

Euphemism in Formosan Languages

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Found in every language, euphemism resides in our pragmatic competence alongside taboo words. Euphemism is defined as the cognitive process of conceptualizing forbidden reality (i.e. taboo) manifested in discourse through the use of linguistic mechanisms which enables the speaker to attenuate a forbidden concept or reality in a certain context or in a specific pragmatic situation (Casas Gómez 2009:738). Therefore, euphemism is not only a linguistic device which functions to replace the ‘unpronounceable’, but also a reflection of our pragmatic competence which is interrelated with our cognitive processes that categorize the conceptualization of different contextual expressions (Lee 2011).

This talk provides an overview of euphemism in Formosan languages from both cognitive and typological perspectives. Building upon the research methodology set up in Lee (2011), which investigates metaphorical euphemism of RELATIONSHIP and DEATH in three Formosan languages--Kavalan, Paiwan, and Seediq, this talk broadens the scope by taking other Formosan languages into consideration and including other semantic domains of euphemistic expressions.

Euphemism in these languages is analyzed from two approaches: First, two pragmatic types are identified: fixed euphemism and contextual euphemism (cf. Zhang, Zhiang, and Yu 1998). Secondly, euphemism is divided into two linguistic types: lexical euphemism and metaphorical euphemism, ‘which adopts metaphorical mapping of both source and target domains to express the notion of a forbidden domain as a result of conscious choices from pragmatic competence’ (Lee 2011: 356). Metaphorical euphemism is tackled within the framework of Lakoff and Johnson’s (1980) Cognitive Metaphor Theory, and the metaphors manifested by these euphemistic expressions are categorized from a typological point of view.

References

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